US launches missile strikes against Yemen

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With the US Navy's firing of Tomahawk cruise missiles against targets on Yemen's Red Sea Coast early Thursday, Washington has embarked on another major escalation of a spiraling campaign of military aggression aimed at imposing US imperialist hegemony throughout the Middle East and around the globe.

The attack against Yemen is only one front in US military operations that stretch from Afghanistan to Iraq, Syria and beyond. It has been carried out with no public debate, much less even the pretense of obtaining the consent of the American people.

With the US election less than a month away, neither the Democratic or the Republican candidate—nor for that matter the media—has shown the slightest inclination to divert from the degraded scandal-mongering that dominates both campaigns to discuss the implications of military action that could rapidly drag the world into a major regional and even global war.

President Barack Obama approved the missile strikes, but made no speech nor even issued a perfunctory written explanation for the US attack.

The Pentagon has provided the only US explanation for the missile attacks on Yemen, claiming that they represented "limited self-defense strikes conducted to protect our personnel, our ships and our freedom of navigation in this important maritime passageway."

According to the US military's account, the targeting of Yemeni territory was a response to two separate incidents in which missiles were fired from Yemen at the USS Mason, part of a three-ship US flotilla patrolling the Bab al Mandab Strait, the strategic passageway that separates the Arabian Peninsula from the Horn of Africa and links the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean.

Some 4.7 million barrels of oil were shipped daily through the strait last year, much of it bound for China, along with 40 percent of global maritime trade. US imperialism is determined to establish its control over the narrow waterway as a chokepoint to be employed against its rivals and to assure that its navy has the ability to traverse this strategic passage and deny access to all others.

Both the Houthi rebel movement that controls the Yemeni capital of Sanaa and the Yemeni army which is aligned with this movement have denied that they targeted US warships and have denounced the cruise missile attack as an act of aggression.

There is no reason anyone should take the Pentagon's account for good coin. No evidence whatsoever has been produced to substantiate the claim that the Houthis were behind the missile attacks on the USS Mason, or indeed that any missiles were fired at all.

There are other actors in Yemen with motives for attacking US warships. These include Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, formerly branded by Washington as the world's most dangerous terrorist group, but now fighting in de facto alliance with the US against the Houthi rebels.

Then there is Saudi Arabia, which has waged a savage bombing campaign against Yemen since March 2015 and is responsible for the lion's share of the 10,000 Yemeni deaths since then. While Thursday's missile strikes marked the first direct US attack on targets associated with the Houthi-led government in Sanaa, the Pentagon has provided the logistical and intelligence support, including the aerial refueling of warplanes, without which the murderous Saudi campaign would be impossible. Moreover, the US has poured a whopping $115 billion in arms into the kingdom since Obama took office, resupplying bombs and missiles dropped on Yemeni homes, schools and hospitals.

However, the Obama administration has recently expressed mild reservations about this slaughter, suggesting it might reduce its involvement. A missile

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attack, falsely attributed to the Houthis, would serve to draw the US more directly into the war.

That the missile attacks on the US Navy took place at all is a question that should be approached with deep skepticism. There is a precedent for fabricated military engagements at sea being used as the pretext for a major escalation of American militarism. In 1964, a supposed attack by North Vietnamese gunboats on a US warship in the Gulf of Tonkin was invoked as the rationale for passing the Gulf of Tonkin resolution, granting President Lyndon Johnson authorization for the rapid escalation of the US war in Vietnam. A year after the murky events, Johnson cynically admitted, “For all I know, our navy was shooting at whales out there.”

The main evidence cited by Washington for Houthi involvement in the alleged missile attacks stands as an indictment of US imperialism itself. The alleged attacks have been reported in the wake of the savage October 8 bombing of a funeral by Saudi warplanes that claimed at least 155 lives and left another 500 wounded. Fragments of the 500-pound bombs used to massacre the mourners, who included senior officials in the Houthi governing authority as well as children, had markings identifying them as US-supplied. Washington’s claim is that the attacks on the US warship were carried out in retaliation.

The attribution of this motive to the Houthis only underscores US imperialism’s own guilt in relation to war crimes carried out in league with the despotic oil monarchies of the Gulf against one of the poorest nations on the face of the planet. The year-and-a-half-old bombing campaign has destroyed much of the country’s infrastructure and left 14 million people, more than half the country’s population, suffering from hunger.

This criminal war has exposed every pretext employed by Washington to justify its interventions in the Middle East, from the “war on terror” to “human rights.” As in Yemen, so in Iraq, Libya and Syria, US interventions are waged to secure geo-strategic domination and prepare for far more dangerous confrontations with Russia and China.

The threat that these separate conflicts, along with those developing in Eastern Europe and the South China Sea, will coalesce into a third world war grows by the hour.

Without a determined political struggle to unite the working class in a fight against war and its source, the capitalist system, such a global catastrophe is inevitable. The conference “Socialism versus Capitalism and War” being held by the Socialist Equality Party in Detroit on November 5 will be a decisive step in the fight to build such a movement. The *World Socialist Web Site* calls upon all its readers and all those seeking a genuine means to oppose war to register to attend today.

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